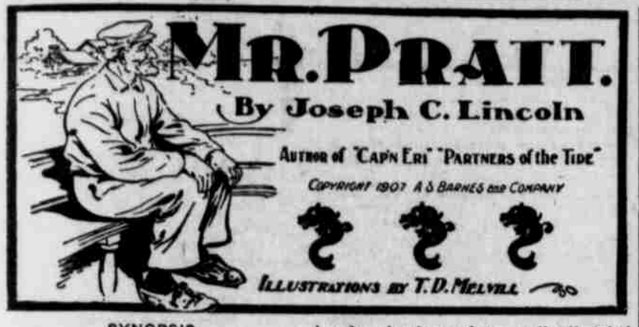

SYNOPSIS.

Mr. Solomon Pratt began comical narration of story, introducing well-to-do Nathan Scudder of his town, and Edward Van Brunt and Martin Hartley, two rich New Yorkers seeking rest. Because of latter pair's lavish expenditure of money, Pratt's first impression was connected with lunatics. The arrival of James Hopper, Van Brunt's valet, gave Pratt the desired information about the New Yorkers. They wished to live what they termed "The Natural Life." Van Brunt, it was learned, was the successful suitor for the hand of Miss Agnes Page, who gave Hartley up. "The Heavenlies" hear a long story of the domestic woes of Mrs. Hannah Jane Purvis, their cook and maid of all work. Decide to let her go and engage Sol. Pratt as chef.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

"And while we're giving you the story of our lives, skipper," says Hartley, with one of his half smiles, "I want to say right here that our present surroundings aren't all that fancy painted 'em. They're too much in the lime light." This was just one of his crazy ways of saying things; I was getting used to 'em a little by now. "We're too prominent," he says. "The populace are too friendly and interested."

"Also," says Van, "the select bunch of feminines from the hotel have taken to making our front walk a sort of promenade. Martin and I are naturally shy; we pine for solitude."

There was more of this, but I managed to find out that what they wanted was a quieter place than Scudder's. A place off by itself, where they could be as natural as a picked chicken. I agreed to try and help 'em find such a place. And I said, too, that I'd think about the cooking idea. Money didn't seem to be no object—I could have my wages by the hod or barrelful—just as I see fit.

"Well," says I, getting up to go, "I'll see. Let me sleep on it for a spell, same's you fellers have done on Nate's pin-feather beds. But I ain't so sure about your staying all summer. How about that young lady friend of yours, Mr. Van Brunt? She may take a notion to send for you to introduce her to the king of Chiny or the grand panjandrum with the little round bottom on top. Then you'd have to pack up and cut your cable."

Van, he looked hard at me for a minute. I thought first he was mad at me for putting my oar in where it wa'n't supposed to be. Then he laughed. "Sol," says he, "that young lady and I are kindred spirits. For a year I'm natural and happy, and she can nurse her Hooligans and go on charity sprees. Then—well, then we fall back on our respected parents and wedded—er—bliss. Hey, Martin?"

Hartley, in the shadow of the vines, lit another cigar and nodded. But he didn't say nothing.

For the next three or four days I chased around trying to find a house and lot where them Heavenly lunatics could be natural. I located a couple of bully summer places, all trees and windmills and posy beds and hot and cold water and land knows what. But they wouldn't do; they "smelled of coupons," Van said. What they really wanted, or thought they wanted, was a state's prison in a desert, I judged.

For a week or ten days we kept the hunt up, but didn't have no luck. Whenever I'd think I'd uncovered a promising outfit the Heavenlies would turn to and dump in a cargo of objections and bury it again. After five or six funerals of this kind I got sort of tired and quit. It got to be July and their month at Nate's was 'most over. I was up there the evening of the third and I happened to ask 'em if they wanted me and the sloop for the next day. There was to be a Fourth of July celebration over to Eastwich and some of the boarders wanted to go and see the balloon and the races and the greased pig chase, and such like. If the Twins didn't care I'd take the job, I said. But they took a notion to go themselves. Van said 'twould be an excuse for me to give 'em another chowder, if nothing more. So, on the morning of the Fourth we started, me and Van Brunt and Hartley and Lord James, in the Dora Bassett. Talk about cruises. If I'd known—and yet out of it come—But there! let me tell you about it.

CHAPTER IV.

The Pig Race.

I don't cal'late that I ever had a better run down the bay than I done that morning. 'Twas a fair wind, and a smooth sea, not the slick, greasy kind, but with little blue waves chasing each other and going "Spat! spat!" under the Dora Bassett's quarter as she danced over 'em. And that's just what she did—dance. There wa'n't any hog-wallowing for her; she just picked up her skirts, so to speak, and tripped along—towing the little landing skiff astern of her—like a 16-year-old girl going to a surprise party.

An early July morning on the bay down our way is good enough for yours truly, Solomon Pratt. Take it with the wind and water like I've said; with the salt smell from the marshes drifting out from the shore, mixed up with the smell of the pitch-pines on the bluffs, and me in the stern of a good boat with the tiller in my hand and a pipe in my face—well, all right! That's my natural life; and I don't need no book to tell me so, neither.

The Heavenlies enjoyed it, and they'd ought to. 'Twas clear then, though it got hazy over to the east'ard later on. But then, as I say, 'twas clear, and you could see the schooners strung out on the skyline, some full up, with their sails shining white in the sun, and others down over the edge, with only their tops'ls showing. Far off, but dead ahead, just as if somebody had dipped their finger in the bluing bottle and smouched it along the bottom of the sky, was the Wapatomac shore, and away aft, right over the stern, was the Trumet lighthouse, like a white chalk mark on a yellow fence, the fence being the high sand bank behind it.

The Twins laid back and soaked in the scenery. They unbuttoned their jackets and took long breaths. They actually forgot to smoke, which was a sort of miracle, as you might say, and even Hartley, who had been bluer than a spoiled mackerel all the morning, braced up and got real chipper. By and by, they resurrected that book of

"The Lunch 'Amper, of Course," He Says. "The 'Amper for the Heatables."

theirs and had what you might call a Natural Life drunk. I never see printing that went to a person's head the way that book seemed to go to theirs. I judged 'twas kind of light and gassy reading and naturally riz and filled the empty places same as you'd fill a balloon.

Everybody was happy but Lord James, and I could see that he wa'n't easy in his mind. He set about amidships of the cockpit and hung onto the thwart with both hands, like he was afraid 'twould bust loose and leave him adrift. If the Dora Bassett had struck a derelict or something and gone down sudden I'll bet they'd have dredged up that Hopper valet and the thwart together. And then they'd have had to pry 'em apart. His lordship wa'n't used to water, unless 'twas to mix with something else.

By and by Hartley shoves both hands into his pockets, tilts his hat back and begins to sing. More effects of the Natural Life spree, I suppose, but 'twas bully good singing. Might have been saying most anything, calling me a short lobster for what I know, 'cause 'twas some foreigner's lingo, but the noise was all right even if I did have to take chances on the words. I cal'late to know music when I hear it.

"Good!" says Van, when his chum stopped. "Martin, you're better already. I haven't heard you sing for two years or more. The last time was at the Delanceys' 'at home.' Do you remember the dowager and 'my daughter?' Heavens! and 'my daughter's' piano playing! Agnes told the dowager that she had never heard anything like it. You and she were together, you know. Give us another verse."

But Martin wouldn't. Shut up like a clam and reached into his pocket for a cigar.

"That was A No. 1, Mr. Hartley," says I. "I wish you could hear Solon Bassett play the fiddle; you'd appreciate it."

Van he roared and even Hartley managed to smile. As for Lord James he looked at me like I'd trod on the queen's corns.

Blessed if I could see what there was funny about it. Solon can play like an Injun. Why, I've seen him bust two strings at a Thanksgiving ball and then play "Mrs. McLeod's Reel"—you know, "Buckshee, nanny-goat, brown bread and beans"—on t'other two, till there wa'n't a still foot in the hall.

We made Eastwich Port about noon and had dinner. I cooked up a kettle of chowder—fetched the clams along with me from home—and 'twould have done you good to see the Heavenlies lay into it. Lord James he skipped around like a hoppergrass in a hot skillet, fetching glasses and laying out nine or ten different kind of forks and spoons side of each plate, and opening wine bottles, and I don't know what all. When he hove in sight of the wharf that morning he was toting a basket pretty nigh as big as he was. I asked him what it was.

"Why, the 'amper," says he.

"The which?" says I.

"The lunch 'amper, of course," he says. "The 'amper for the heatables."

Well, I wondered then what in the nation was in it, for 'twas heavier than lead. I remember that the heft of it made me ask him if he' fetched along some of the late Hannah Jane's left-over riz biscuit. But now I see why 'twas heavy. There was enough dishes and truck for ten men and the cook in that basket. We had my chowder and four kinds of crackers with it, and chicken and asparagus, and nine sorts of pickles, and canned plum pudding with sass, and coffee and good loud healthy cheese, and red wine and champagne. When I'd hoisted in enough of everything so my hatches wouldn't shut tight, and pulling on one of the Twins' cigars, I says to Van:

"Mr. Van Brunt," says I, "is this part of what you call the Natural Life?"

"You bet, skipper!" says he. He hadn't finished the chowder end of the layout yet.

Well, I heaved a sigh. 'Twas kind of unnatural to me, having come on me all to once; but I cal'lated I could get used to it in time without shedding no tears. Didn't want to get used to it too quick, neither; I wanted the novelty to linger along, as you might say.

When the dinner was over—the Heavenlies was well enough acquained with the family to nickname it "lunch"—I started in to help his lordship wash dishes. The Twins sprawled themselves under a couple of pine trees and blew smoke rings.

"Hurry up there, messmate," says I to the valet; "I want to get through time enough to run up to the fair grounds and see that greased pig race."

Hartley had been keeping so still I cal'lated he was dropping off to sleep, but it seems he wa'n't. He set up, stretched, and got to his feet.

"I'll go with you, skipper," says he. "Might as well do that as anything. I've never seen a greased pig race. They don't have 'em on the Street."

"Chase nothing but lambs there," draws Van Brunt, lazy, and with his eyes half shut. Then he turned over and locked at his chum.

"Great Caesar! Martin," he says, "you don't mean to tell me that you're going up into that crowd of hayseeds to hang over a fence and watch some one run, do you? Why any one on God's earth should want to run," he says, "when they can keep still, is beyond me; and why you, of all men, should want to watch 'em do it—that's worse yet. Come here and be natural and decent."

But Hartley wouldn't do it. His blue streak seemed to have struck in again and he was kicking the sand, nervous-like, with his foot.

"Come on, Van," he says. "I want the walk."

"Not much," says Van. "Walking's almost as bad as running. I'll be here when you get back."

It may be that Hartley did want that walk, same as he said, but he didn't seem to get much fun out of it. Went pounding along, his cigar tipped up to the visor of his cap, and his eyes staring at the ground all the time. And he never spoke two words till we got to the fair grounds.

There was a dickens of a crowd, five or six hundred folks, I should think, and more coming all the time. Everybody that could come had borrowed the horses and carryalls of them that couldn't and had brought their wives and mothers-in-law and their children's children unto the third and fourth generation. There was considerable many summer folks—not so many as there is at the cattle show in August—but a good many, just the same. I counted five automobiles, and I see the Barry folks from Trumet riding round in their four-horse coach and putting on airs enough to make 'em lop-sided.

Hartley gave one look around at the gang and his nose turned up to 12 o'clock.

"Gad!" says he, "this, or something like it, is what I've been trying to get away from. Come on, Sol. Let's go back to the boat."

But I hadn't seen so many shows as he had and I wanted to stay.

"You wait a spell, Mr. Hartley," says I. "Let's cruise round a little first."

So we went shoving along through the crowd, getting our toes tramped on and dodging peddlers and such like every other minute. There was the "test-your-strength" machine and the merry-go-round and the "ossified man" in a tent: "Walk right up, gents, and cast your eyes on the greatest marvel of the age all alive and solid stone only two nickels a dime ten cents," and all the rest of it. Pretty soon we come to where the feller was selling the E Pluribus Unum candy—red, white and blue, and a slab as big as a brick for a dime.

Hartley stopped and stares at it.

"For heaven's sake!" says he. "What do they do with that?"

"Do with it?" says I. "Eat it, of course."

"No?" he says. "Not really?"

"Humph!" I says. "You just wait a shake."

There was a little red-headed youngster scooting in and out among the folks' knees and I caught him by the shoulder. "Hi, Andrew Jackson!" says I. "Want some candy?"

He looked up at me as pert and sassy as a blackbird on a scarecrow's shoulder.

"Bet your natural!" says he. I jumped.

"Lord!" says I; "I cal'late he knows you."

Hartley smiled. "How do they sell that—that Portland cement?" says he. "Give me some," he says, holding a half dollar to the feller behind the oil-cloth counter. The man chiseled off enough for a fair-sized tombstone and handed it out. Hartley passed it to the boy. He bit off a hunk that made him look like he had the mumps all on one side, and commenced to crunch it.

"There!" says I. "That's proof enough, ain't it?"

But he wa'n't satisfied. "Wait a minute," says he. "I want to see what it does to him."

Well, it didn't do nothing, apparently, except to make the little shaver's jaws sound like a rock crusher, so we went on. By and by we come to the fence alongside of the place where they had the races. The sack race was on, half a dozen fellers hopping around tied up in meal bags, and we see that. Then Hartley was for going home again, but I managed to hold him. The greased pig was the next number on the dance order and I wanted to see it.

Maj. Philander Phinney, he's chairman of the Eastwich selectmen and pretty nigh half as big as he thinks he is; he stood on tip-toe on the judge's stand and bellered that the greased pig contest was open to boys under 15, and that the one that caught the pig and hung on to it would get five dollars. In less than three shakes of a herring's hind leg there was boys enough on that field to start a reform school. They ranged all the way from little chaps who ought to have been home cutting their milk teeth to "boys" that had yellow fuzz on their chins and a plug of chewing tobacco in their pants' pocket. They fetched in the pig shut up in a box with laths over the top. He was little and black and all shining with grease. Then they stretched a rope across one end of the race field and lined up the pig-chasers behind it.

"Hello!" says Hartley, "there's our Portland cement youngster. He'll never run with that marble quarry inside of him."

Sure enough, there was the boy that had tackled the candy. I could see his red head blazing like a lightning bug alongside of a six-foot infant with overalls and a promising crop of side whiskers. Next thing I knew the starter—Issachar Tiddit, 'twas—he opens the lid to the pig box and hollers "Go!"

The line dropped. That little lone pig see 20 odd pair of hands shooting towards him, and he fetched a yell like a tugboat whistle and put down the field, with the whole crew behind him. The crowd got on tiptoe and stretched their necks to see. Everybody hollered and hurrahed and "haw, hawed."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE ASPIDISTRA OR "PARLOR PALM" PLANT

Variety of Decorative House Plant Which Responds Generously to Good Care.

The aspidistra, or parlor palm, derives its name from aspidiscon, a little round shield, probably from the shape of its flower, which, though somewhat insignificant, is peculiar from its being borne upon the surface of the soil. There are two forms, green and variegated. The aspidistra is perhaps the most valuable of all plants for room embellishment, as well as for effect in the greenhouse, whilst, being evergreen, it is especially valuable for decorative purposes all the year round; in fact, its stately and bold appearance causes it to rank among the best of all plants for indoors, in draughts and badly lighted rooms, and with reasonable care it succeeds with but little attention. It will also be found, too, more profitable than many expensive plants purchased from time to time to place upon the table or in the window, these usually having to be replaced quickly, so little are they adapted to a prolonged sojourn in an uncertain temperature with unnatural surroundings. One of the advantages of the aspidistra is that gas affects it but little in comparison with other plants. One cannot help but notice in many cases its neglect as regards cultivation, the plants, as it were, being left to take care of themselves. A good plant should be purchased from a nurseryman, and if this is given due attention there is no reason why, after several years, the grower may not be able to fill the rooms or greenhouse with a considerable number of handsome specimens owing to the easiness with which it is propagated, as shown in the accompanying illustrations.

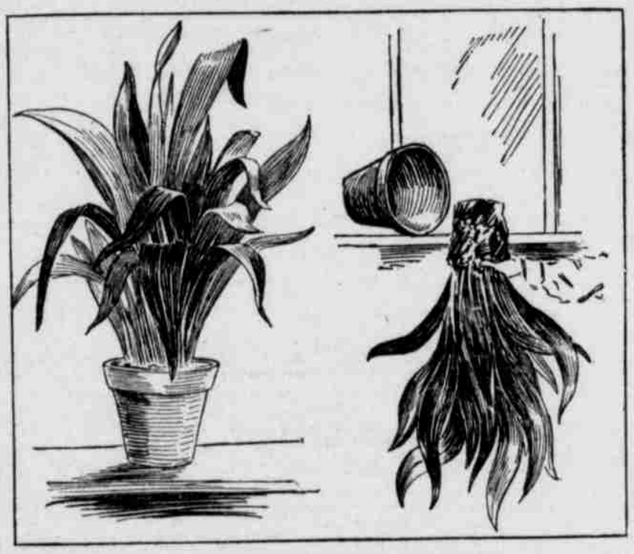

Fig. 1—Too Crowded. Fig. 2—Removal from Pot Preparatory to Dividing the Root.

Propagation by division is best carried out early in March, and a supply of soil composed of two parts loam,

The Repotted Divided Roots.

one part leaf mold and one part sand should be made up for the potting, as this is found to be the compost in which the aspidistra best succeeds. After about two years' growth the leaves will have increased to such an extent that they are apt to crowd one another, as in Fig. 1, and as small, misshapen specimens result, repotting and division is then necessary. To commence operations place the fingers of the left hand between the stems of the leaves on the surface of the soil, turning the plant completely upside down; then with a gentle tap of the edge of the pot, upon the greenhouse staging or similar firm substance the pot may be easily removed, as in Fig. 2. The mass of soil and root can then be divided into three or as many parts as may be decided upon (see Fig. 3), this operation being carried out by the aid of a sharp knife, cutting through the rhizome, or rootstock, carefully and cleanly, separating the roots with as little damage as possible. To make each division shapely it may be necessary to detach several single leaves, with rootlets, these being laid on one side for later attention. The spare space in the pot should be filled with the compost above described, care being taken that ample drainage is afforded, with a few pieces of crocks (broken flower-pots). Firm potting is desirable, this being attained by giving the base of the pots several decided taps upon the bench in order to settle the contents firmly and the soil about the roots.

The single leaves require potting in the same way in five-inch pots, arranging the tall leaves in one pot, the small in another. This is an excellent plan to obtain plants for different positions, the taller giving a better appearance on a hall table or in the conservatory, the smaller being more fitted for the side table or in a fancy stand or similar receptacle. This is somewhat drastic treatment, but if the plants are carefully staked with a light stick or bamboo cane and tied up with raffia for a week or two they will speedily recover if kept from bright sunlight, the tying up of the leaves being necessary to prevent their weight levering the roots out of position. The final proceeding is to give the contents of the pots several copious waterings, in order to wash the soil well round the roots, but be sure the water gets away.

Sometimes it will be found that old plants make no progress. This is usually due to the fact that fresh soil entirely is required, the old having become sour from over-watering or other causes. Immerse the whole of the pot and contents in a pail of water for one hour, remove the pot, washing away the old soil altogether, then repot with new pot and soil. As to watering, the aspidistra requires to be freely watered in summer and sparingly in winter. It is preferred by some, instead of giving several waterings, to stand the plant in a pail of water for some little time, allowing the pot to be wholly covered, thus affording a lasting drink, and this method is all very well when the watering of a plant is understood. It is a common practice to place the pots in fancy vases or jardinieres; this is detrimental to any plant, as it hinders the air getting to the pot, which is porous. If, however, this course is adopted the outer vessel should be considerably larger than that containing the plant itself, to allow a certain amount of air to circulate between the two; also it should not be forgotten that water must not accumulate at the bottom of the vase, as this rapidly becomes stagnant and sour, and is very injurious to the plant.

Wagon with Low Platform

For Handling Barrels It Cannot Be Beat. The Wheels and Frame of an Old Vehicle Can Be Used in Construction.

EXCELLENT WEATHER AND MAGNIFICENT CROPS

REPORTS FROM WESTERN CANADA ARE VERY ENCOURAGING.

A correspondent writes the Winnipeg (Man.) Free Press: "The Pincher Creek district, (Southern Alberta), the original home of fall wheat, where it has been grown without failure, dry seasons and wet, for about 25 years, is excelling itself this year. The yield and quality are both phenomenal, as has been the weather for its harvesting. Forty bushels is a common yield, and many fields go up to 50, 60 and over, and most of it No. 1 Northern. Even last year, which was less favorable, similar yields were in some cases obtained, but owing to the season the quality was not so good. It is probably safe to say that the average yield from the Old Man's River to the boundary will be 47 or 48 bushels per acre, and mostly No. 1 Northern. One man has just made a net profit from his crop of $19.55 per acre, or little less than the selling price of land. Land here is too cheap at present, when a crop or two will pay for it, and a failure almost unknown. Nor is the district dependent on wheat, all other crops do well, also stock and dairying, and there is a large market at the doors in the mining towns up the Crows Nest Pass, and in British Columbia, for the abundant hay of the district, and poultry, pork, and garden truck. Coal is near and cheap. Jim Hill has an eye on its advantages, and has invested here, and is bringing the Great Northern Railroad soon, when other lines will follow."

The wheat, oat and barley crop in other parts of Western Canada show splendid yields and will make the farmers of that country (and many of them are Americans) rich. The Canadian Government Agent for this district advises us that he will be pleased to give information to all who desire it about the new land regulations by which a settler may now secure 160 acres in addition to his 160 homestead acres, at $3.00 an acre, and also how to reach these lands into which railways are being extended. It might be interesting to read what is said of that country by the Editor of the Marshall (Minn.) News-Messenger, who made a trip through portions of it in July, 1908. "Passing through more than three thousand miles of Western Canada's agricultural lands, touring the northern and southern farming belts of the Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, with numerous drives through the great grain fields, we were made to realize not only the magnificence of the crops, but the magnitude, in measures, of the vast territory opening, and to be opened to farming immigration. There are hundreds of thousands of farmers there, and millions of acres under cultivation, but there is room for millions more, and other millions of acreage available. We could see in Western Canada in soil, product, topography or climate, little that is different from Minnesota, and with meeting at every point many business men and farmers who went there from this state, it was difficult to realize one was beyond the boundary of the country."

A RUNNER-UP.

Mr. Asker—Do you find your new auto a good climber, Harrry?

Harry—Well, it's not a speed marvel when it comes to running up hills, but say, old man, you just ought to see it run up a bill.

By the Hurricane Route.

"He's long wanted to leave the country," says a Billville exchange, "but he never could afford the railroad fare, but just as he had given up all hope a hurricane came along and gave him and his house free transportation. It was providential and he pulled through at last."—Atlanta Constitution.

Dainty Bits of Sentiment.

A fine bit of sentiment from Editor Howe of the Atchison Globe: "Treat the faith your friends have in you as carefully as you would handle a dainty silk parasol in a violent wind and rain storm."